



**Testimony of Reverend Michael Jones
Senior Pastor
Friendly Temple M. B. Church
St. Louis, MO**

**On “Revitalizing Communities:
Are Faith-Based Organizations Getting the Federal Assistance They Need?”**

**For the Subcommittee on Federalism and the Census
Committee on Government Reform
House of Representatives
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Introduction and Overview

Thank you, Chairman Turner, Ranking Member Clay, and Subcommittee members for this opportunity to share with you Friendly Temple’s accomplishments with community revitalization.

Friendly Temple M. B. Church (FTMBC) is a faith-based organization committed to leveraging its resources and building relationships to revitalize its surrounding community. With the establishment of non-profit corporations, development of several properties, coordination of congregation members, and collaboration with various community partners, FTMBC has been able to make a significant impact on the community it serves.

FTMBC is located in the heart of the inner city of St. Louis, Missouri. Our surrounding area is characterized as one of the areas in the City of St. Louis with the highest incidence of poverty. We have:

- ☐ One of the highest incidence of unemployment
- ☐ Census tracts with the highest proportion of persons living in poverty
- ☐ Highest percentage of children living in poverty
- ☐ Poor housing quality
- ☐ Many tracts of vacant, abandoned and boarded up homes
- ☐ High incidence of crime

We are located in an area that many of you are all too familiar with, one that represents American’s disinvested community.

Because of the needs, our congregation wanted to make a difference in the lives of the people around FTMBC, so we created a nonprofit organization, called the **Robert Fulton Development, Inc.** Many of FTMBC's outreach efforts are managed through Robert Fulton Development, Inc., established in 1996 and named in honor of the founding Pastor of FTMBC, Robert Fulton Davis. The mission of Robert Fulton is to revitalize the community by maximizing the potential of all community members through a holistic approach focusing on (1) Children and Youth Development, (2) Education, (3) Health Services, (4) Counseling, (5) Food and Clothing, and (6) Affordable Housing. Through these six focus areas and with the dedication of a strong volunteer base, Robert Fulton has been able to serve the community with a number of initiatives from feeding the hungry to tutoring school-aged children. These services operate from FTMBC facilities and depend strongly on the dedication of FTMBC members. FTMBC invests in the work of Robert Fulton Development, Inc.

The members of FTMBC have contributed various skills and talents to serve the needs of the community. There are a number of individuals gifted with skills in areas like organizational development, management, food preparation, carpentry, general maintenance, and child care—key skills needed in the delivery of the many outreach services offered through the church. With just as much commitment, there are also a number of professionals who have donated so much of their time and efforts toward fulfilling the church's outreach mission. They represent professions such as education, counseling, law, accounting, social work, computer science, engineering, and architecture.

In addition to utilizing the skills and talents available through the congregation, FTMBC has also been successful at building community partnerships with government entities (local and federal), corporations, other churches, colleges and universities, and community organizations. These partnerships have enabled FTMBC to increase the impact of its work by serving more people and developing projects larger in scope.

Through the leveraging of resources and building of relationships, FTMBC has been able to:

- ❑ Serve over 4,000 individuals annually through its various outreach programs
- ❑ Develop and manage 10 housing units for low- to moderate-income families through the renovation of decaying properties
- ❑ Develop its first senior housing project—a duplex built by members of the congregation offering rent-free housing to very low income seniors in the congregation
- ❑ Design and renovate a derelict 40,000 square-foot warehouse into what is now known as the Friendly Family Life and Worship Center which includes a full-size gymnasium, classrooms, community meeting space, office space, and more
- ❑ Partner with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to develop two HUD 202: Supportive Housing for Seniors projects, providing nearly 100 apartment units to very low income seniors in the St. Louis community
- ❑ Operate the one of the largest Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites in the St. Louis area, preparing more than 1,500 tax returns in 2005 generating \$900,000 in Earned Income and Child Tax Credits, and \$350,000 in state property tax credits for seniors and people with disabilities
- ❑ The development projects represent new investments in a disinvested area valued at over \$15 million in the past five years

Impact of Federal Assistance

When the Executive Order 13279 was issued in 2002 requiring federal departments to treat all organizations fairly and without regard to religion in federal programs, many in the faith community were excited by the prospect of this opportunity which would enable them to expand their work in the community. The idea that the contribution that faith-based organizations was valued was commendable. FTMBC's experience with federal programs has been with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). We have found this entity to be exemplary of the standards established by the Faith-Based Initiative.

In the Fall of 2000, FTMBC was awarded its first HUD 202 grant for \$5.3 million to construct a three-story building to house 58 one-bedroom units for very low-income seniors, and 1 two-bedroom unit for a resident manager. The site for this project, located on the corner of Wells Avenue and Burd Avenue in North St. Louis City, is adjacent to the Youth Worship Center and near the Friendly Family Life and Worship Center which provides many supportive services that will be available to the residents. Although the residents have access to transportation services from FTMBC, major bus stops are within 200 yards of the project so the residents have easy access to shopping and medical facilities. This project was completed in the Summer of 2002 and named Friendly Village Apartments.



Rendering of Friendly Village Apartments—FTMBC's HUD 202 Project

FTMBC received its second award from the HUD 202 program in the Fall of 2004 to expand Friendly Village Apartments to house 42 one-bedroom units. Friendly Village Apartments—East is currently in the pre-development phase and is scheduled to be complete by the Summer of 2005.

The process for applying for funding from HUD was not as difficult as anticipated. As an organization that had no experience with writing government grants or working with Federal Government agencies, there was some apprehension. However, once FTMBC was connected with the local HUD office, we found the staff to be accommodating and very helpful. The Multifamily Division provided informative workshops regarding the application process, responded to questions in a prompt and concise manner, and encouraged participation. It was

apparent that the staff felt that faith-based organizations could be strong partners in revitalizing and serving communities.

This relationship with HUD continues to grow. FTMBC was presented with the HUD St. Louis Field Office Shining Star Award in 2003 for its uniquely-design senior housing development in north St. Louis. The local faith-based initiative director, Mr. James Hurd, has been instrumental in providing information about funding opportunities. Additionally, we are currently looking at partnerships with national organizations such as The Enterprise Foundation to provide necessary capacity building funds to help us to grow and evolve as a community development organization.

How the Faith-Based Initiative Could Strengthen the Relationship with the Federal Government and Faith-Based Organizations

While FTMBC has had a successful relationship with HUD over the past 5 years and has benefited from the principles set forth by the Faith-Based Initiative, there are some strategies worth considering for strengthening the relationship between Federal Government agencies and faith-based organizations.

1. Having an identified point of entry or contact into each government agency who is available to assist faith-based organizations with navigating through the application process and the system of operations would be extremely helpful—particularly for those who have a demonstrated commitment to community development but may not have the capacity needed to initiate these processes.
2. Providing technical assistance that is sensitive to the varying needs of faith-based organization; an understanding that there are different tiers of organizations would also be beneficial to those who need to build their capacity. This technical assistance may address strategic planning, infrastructure development, and the need for the diversification of resources.

These strategies would be beneficial to faith-based organizations regardless of whether government funds are needed to expand programs or create new initiatives.

In closing, let me just say that the collaboration of the work between faith-based groups, the federal government and other national nonprofits is what is needed to make a difference in the lives of low-income families. As faith-based groups continue to galvanize the expertise through its congregation, we need continued support from the government to actualize the vision. This initiative helps us to actualize the vision. We need your continued support.

Thank you.